Coming Out from Under the Ethnographic Interview

Alford A. Young, Jr.
Department of Sociology and
Center for Afroamerican and African Studies
University of Michigan

DRAFT – NO CITATION

My principal method for sociological research is the ethnographic interview. Thus far, my research has largely entered on urban-based, low-income African American men and on African American social scientists and humanists who conduct research and teach on the African American experience. In recent decades, ethnographic interviewing has been embraced rather strongly by researchers in various sub-fields in the discipline of sociology. More specifically, sociologists interested in the formal study of culture and race and ethnic relations have employed this method in recent research efforts. I regard myself as standing within both camps. In the most simple terms, I interview people about their life experiences, their visions of self, and their visions of particular features of the social world in order to gain some purchase on their "common-sense" understandings about these matters. In responding to the core questions posed for this conference, I will first provide some initial remarks about cultural analysis in sociology via ethnographic interviews. I will then comment on each the three core questions, first by providing some general commentary, and then by addressing what I maintain to be a standing issue pertaining to each question.

Taking A Stab at Cultural Analysis Through Ethnographic Interviews

A guiding presupposition for employing ethnographic interviewing is that it allows for researchers to grasp how individuals make meanings of themselves and the social words that they inhabit. The basic research objectives for those who employ this methodological tool are to discern what people "know" about themselves and their social worlds, how that knowledge is socially constructed and disseminated, and how that knowledge affect the behaviors enacted by such people. Each of these points of consideration concern some aspect of the sociology of meaning-making. Even a cursory history of sociological investigations of meaning making is beyond the purview of this memo. Yet, it should suffice to state that much of the past three decades of sociological explorations of meaning making as a cultural process is an extension of the work of Clifford Geertz (1973). Geertz provided sociology, anthropology, and perhaps some other disciplines, with an argument that carved out a space for cultural analysis to offer something more than focused studies of the values and norms that circumscribe collective and individual action. Of course, a slew of sociologists have posited their own claims about the sociology of meaning-making – including Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Margaret Archer, Robert Wuthnow, among others -- such that this area has become a vast and rich sub-field of the sociology of culture.

My own interest in ethnographic interviewing largely concerns issues of race and urban poverty. Here I regard ethnographic interviewing as a tool that helps broaden the parameters for cultural analyses of the urban poor. Throughout the history of American sociology, urban ethnography has offered the most vivid portrayals of the behavior of the urban poor. In doing so, this tradition has played a crucial role in sustaining the notion that what people think about can be derived from what they do. More specifically, ethnography has sustained the notion that what people do conveys much about how they make meaning of themselves, other people, and varied aspects of the social world. Surely, this is often this is the case. However, a flaw in this

approach is that people's behavior is not a transparent reflection of their underlying thoughts. For example, the fact that an individual is chronically unemployed and does not go to work on a regular basis (their behavior), tells us nothing about the complexity of their thoughts on the intricacies of the modern labor markets (their thoughts). Similarly, if someone has opted not to continue high school this does not mean that he or she does not have a keen sense of how and why a college education might help one to get ahead in life. Thus, it is important to pay attention to what people articulate as their own understanding of how social processes work and how they as individuals might negotiate the complex social terrain rather than simply looking at their actions.

I maintain that this oversight in the field of sociological studies of race and urban poverty stems in large part from a lack of dialogue between scholars in urban poverty research (as a branch of the sociology of race and ethnic relations) and those in the sociology of culture. Clearly, urban ethnographers have made significant contributions to the cultural analysis of the poor. Yet that tradition has focused upon the presumed values and norms of poor people rather than a more intensive investigation of the beliefs and worldviews that such people maintain. In short, I regard the ethnographic interview as an essential means of bringing into the cultural analysis of the urban poor those issues, perspectives, and concerns that sociologists of meaning-making have begun pursuing in the past two decades.

Rigor and Ethnographic Interviewing

As with the other guideline questions that provide a mandate for this memo, a discussion of what constitutes rigor would take many pages to explore in sufficient detail. At minimum, I offer that rigor largely centers on the extent to which rich and provocative accounts are drawn from research participants, the extent to which these accounts collectively constitute some clear position or vantage point concerning the research question at hand, and whether ambiguities and contradictions in the testimonies of such research participants are effectively documented and investigated.

To be clear, this process of documentation and investigation involves something different from efforts to resolve or erase ambiguities and contradictions in the course of data analysis. Instead, the challenge at hand is to determine as best as the researcher can how and why contradictions and apparent ambiguities emerge in the testimonies of research participants. In doing so, the researcher remain committed to the notion that a complex and fluid social world sometimes demands that people contradict themselves (or else remain ambiguous in expressing their views) while explaining who they believe themselves to be, what purposes their actions have, or how they think that the social world functions. Rigorous analyses of interview data, then, involve not only tabulating the styles, patterns, forms, or types of content of people's expressions, but also when certain expressions do not fit easily with others, and why that may be the case for the individual who has been asked to account for him or herself with respect to a set of issues or concerns.

In the course of conducting sociological research via ethnographic interviewing a core standard of rigor is to achieve a sense of empirical saturation, or to reach a moment in data collection or analysis when similar or consistent patterns of argument or articulation are being offered by the research participants. Such saturation presumably indicates that the meanings that are constructed, adopted, or employed by such research participants (who, themselves, reflect the larger social group or category that is the target of the researcher's investigation) reflect some durable, and purposeful, shared cultural artifact.

There is, however, a standing dilemma in trying to ascertain whether one has achieved saturation. That is because in order for a researcher to feel saturated by consistent patterns or types of expression that researcher must translate those expressions into schemata or

frameworks that are a part of the cultural interpretive repertoire of the researcher. Hence, what may be consistent or coherent for research participants, given their own cultural frames of understanding, may appear to the researcher to be contradictory, ambiguous, or incoherent.

Some form of serial exchange between researchers and respondents must occur for these potential cultural divides to be recognized and reconciled, but rarely is their sufficient time and financial support for such follow up interaction (and this is aside from the issue of the political implications of suspending or advancing one kind of interpretive frame (the research participant's, for instance) rather than another (such as the researcher's). This all points to the politics of interpretation as a crucial point for consideration in ethnographic interviewing. Furthermore, the extent to which a researcher may be differ from a research participant in terms of class, race or ethnicity, age, or any number of other demographic traits may (but not always, as I explore a bit later) heighten this concern.

Now I turn to discussion of one specific matter, that of silence produced in the course of interviewing, that is often taken to stand in the way of data rigorous analysis, but, I believe, should be taken as an avenue toward it.

Silence has emerged in the past decade as an important topic of concern in sociological research (Denzin 1997, Hertz 1997, Kvale 1996, Poland and Pederson 1998). Much of the emphasis on silence, however, explores its significance in one of three traditional forms. The first concerns how people intentionally employ it to protect themselves by not revealing too much to an investigator. The second concerns how silence results from cultural differences between the investigator and the people that he or she is investigating (i.e, the absence of lengthy discussion on a topic because the respondent does not understand how or why the investigator has framed an inquiry). The third, which is closely related to the second, is the appearance of silence as a result of being asked about a common, regular, nondescript aspect of one's life such that the respondent has difficulty providing an extended commentary on the matter (i.e., why someone starts eating a meal with the vegetables rather than the meat, or why a particular shirt or pair of socks was worn on a given day). The form of silence has received less attention from research methodologists, is categorical silence. This concerns the lack of requisite understanding or insight by which to frame an elaborate response or commentary (Poland and Pederson 1998). The researcher's awareness of this form of silence comes from knowledge of possible alternative articulations or the existence of actors who, by virtue of certain circumstances or conditions, are able to provide more elaborate commentary than are other actors.

The analytical challenge confronting ethnographic interviewers is to develop logics for better addressing not only the "unsaid" in the commentary of research participants, but also the "less elaborated upon," especially if other respondents provide more lengthy or detailed responses to the same questions. This move involves a shift from comparing the content of texts to comparisons of the presence and absence of certain kids of commentary across texts.

Reaching Across Disciplines

I believe that prior to their being a serious consideration of how such standards may be applied across disciplines some better sense of how the ethnographic interview is employed and regarded in various disciplines is in order. I do not proclaim to know much about this. Accordingly, I raise it as a matter for open discussion. I do believe, however, that particular social science fields may have different perspectives on the meaningfulness of the kind of contradictory or ambiguous commentary offered through such a research technique, and this query about disciplinary differences includes the question of whether it is maintained in some disciplines that the research endeavor is complete only if such developments are somehow resolved through serial interviews, intensive probing, or the deletion of the research

respondent's commentary all together in order to focus more intently on more transparent and seemingly more lucid commentaries in the data set.

One matter concerning ethnographic interviewing that does transcend disciplinary boundaries pertains to the quest to garner intimacy with respondents such that they provide the kind of in-depth commentary that this is the ultimate goal of this research activity. A common feature of qualitative research endeavors (ethnographic interviewing as well as any other close-to-the-people-under-study research approach) is the quest to establish intimate or sustained interaction with research subjects in presumably "natural" settings. In essence, the researcher steps into, and to varying degrees shares in, the everyday social worlds of the individuals under study. Scholars who engage this form of research are forced to continuously reflect upon and account for the depth and quality of their relationships to the individuals, situations, and conditions comprising their research agenda. In fact, in the past thirty years has been a period of rich dialogue about these matters (commonly referred to as the insider and outsider debate, see Andersen 1993, Baca Zinn 1979, DeVault 1995, Merton 1972, Naples 1996, Stanfield 1993, Wilson 1974).

An initial underlying presumption in this debate was that researchers who share membership in the same social categories as their respondents (the most common being race, gender, and class) were best suited to uncover ideas, arguments, and opinions about issues and concerns related to those people or to those social categories (Merton 1972). A corollary presumption was that those researchers who do not share such membership either had to work especially hard to acquire the trust and confidence of respondents, or else accept that their scholarly analysis and interpretation may not reflect the veracity, depth, or subtlety that emerges from so-called "insider" research. In reacting to these presumptions qualitative field researchers strove to address whether and, if so, how greater ease, comfort, comprehension, and transparency could be established in the course of research, especially if such researchers occupied extreme outsider statuses. These efforts led field researchers to explore more critically the epistemological implications of either working to further their insider status or to confront the problems resulting from their outsider statuses (Andersen 1993, Baca Zinn 1979, De Andrade 2000, De Vault 1995, Ladner 1973, Naples 1996, Venkatesh 2002, Wilson 1974).

As most of these discussions centered on exploring the possibilities for increasing, maintaining, or reconciling with the difficulties of securing insider status, an implicit value was placed upon the insider position as the location that is most conducive for data collection.[1] The belief was that functioning from this position would enable the researcher to acquire the most meaningful, accurate, and honest data. Outsider positions were taken to be less constructive, if not all together detrimental, for conducting qualitative research. However, it is not always the case that occupying outsider positions necessarily inhibits a researcher from acquiring rich and insightful qualitative data. Hence, a reconsideration of outsider statuses is on order because, as I discuss below, the maintenance of rapport in the field can be threatened, if not altogether ruptured, by certain kinds of insider statuses.

Contemporarily, the insider-outsider debate has reached a point where the rigid dichotomization of insider and outsider positions has been called into question. It has been argued more recently that the biases and shortcomings associated with a researcher's occupation of an outsider status can sometimes be overcome or managed by the researcher's explicit acknowledgment of the existence of social distance or categorical dissimilarities between him or her and the individuals under study. Indeed, more thorough assessments of a researcher's distance or dissimilarity to the people under study, coupled with the researcher's declaration that no attempt was made to artificially or simplistically reduce or resolve these circumstances, have been woven into many of the contemporary qualitative studies that involve extending beyond racial and ethnic boundaries (Bourgeois 1996, Lamont 2002, Venkatesh 2000, Waters 1999). Moreover, it has become customary to include an appendix or a preface

that illustrates exactly how the researcher engaged the field and established rapport with the individuals who were the central points of concern in the research. Indeed, in some cases attention was drawn to these issues throughout the body of the work itself. The point of this effort was to demonstrate to audiences how much researchers were aware of biases or shortcomings in their approach to field sites, which then conveyed a sense of legitimacy about their resulting work.[2]

The effort to more explicitly and provocatively explore how insider-outsider categories apply to researchers is a key advance over early claims that any extreme outsider status threatens the validity of the research. Accordingly, another key advance in research over the past three decades has been to open up considerations of how outsider status factors in the fieldwork experience, particularly in the development of ties to informants and the cultivation of respondents. One such consideration is the researcher's documentation of how one or more of their outsider characteristics become relevant points of reference in the fieldwork experience. For example, one scholarly commentary (Naples 1996) documents how respondents who initially took the researcher to be an inside member of the community sometimes self-defined as outsiders because they felt themselves to adhere to different cultural practices and ways of thinking in comparison to other community members. Although not concerned with any outsider statuses maintained by the researcher, this work provided an important analytical space for re-thinking whether and how outsiderness plays into the data collection process in constructive ways.

Another commentary on ethnic identity focused on respondents' inability to immediately discern whether the researcher occupied an ethnic insider status relevant to the research agenda (De Andrade 2000). That inability became a crucial factor for creating conversations in the field about this identity, which ultimately led to what the researcher found to be a rich ans insightful pool of data for her project. The author interviewed people of her own nationality (Cape Verdian) about their ethnic consciousness. However, in most of the interviews the respondents made it clear that were not immediately sure that De Andrade was, herself, of that nationality. In analyzing her experiences De Andrade offered that the insider position is not static and durable, but is instead dynamic. It is continually recreated throughout the course of one's fieldwork. Her interviews, then, were serial experiences in working to establish and continually maintain an insider status throughout the conversations.

A third commentary (Reinharz 1997) asserts that one or more of a researcher's multiple selves may become relevant in the interactive dynamics of fieldwork. These multiple selves include a researcher's race, gender, or class status, as well as varied aspects of their personality or personal experiences. If they do not already appear at first sight in the course of fieldwork any of them are susceptible to becoming visible to respondents and field informants. More importantly, respondents and informants may react to any of these in ways that foster, hinder, or dramatically conversations with the researcher. In essence, respondents and informants may use these features and characteristics to determine the ways in which that researcher is an outsider or insider, and adjust their interaction with the researcher accordingly throughout an interview of fieldwork encounter.

These and other investigations have led to the contemporary assertion is that there is no singular insider or outsider position that researchers occupy during the course of fieldwork, but rather myriad positions and statuses that can be viewed by respondents either as insider or outsider depending on the social circumstances or conditions affecting the research endeavor (De Andrade 2000, Jackson 2001, Naples 1996, Reinhartz 1997). Accordingly, the distinction between insider and outsider status should best be thought of as an analytical rather than experiential divide. Moreover, it has now been accepted that insider and outsider positions are fluid as they are continually restructured, retained, and abandoned during the course of interaction between researchers and respondents (De Andrade 2000, Naples 1996, Reinhartz

1997, Riessman 1987, Song and Parker 1995). These more recent commentators have demonstrated that insider status, though crucial for the ultimate advance of field research, is neither easily attainable nor consistently maintainable. Thus, although researchers continue to strive to maximize their insider status, in fact they stand experientially in the midst of ever-shifting configurations of both positions.

We now stand at a moment when contemporary social science inquiry has accepted that outsider status not only cannot be fully erased in the course of research, but that it also plays a role in the production of data. Some of these conversations have been about how respondents define themselves as outsiders to distinguish aspects of their identities and experiences, or how respondents' designation of the researcher as an outsider promotes conversation that informs the researcher about certain attitudes, opinions, or worldviews maintained by these respondents. Despite these advances and transformations an enduring value is still placed upon the insider status as the privileged position from which to converse with respondents. By this I mean that researchers ultimately aim to increase their insiderness even if they know that they must contend with the various issues concerning outsiderness.[3] Consequently, there lacks a more critical exploration of how insider status may, in fact, inhibit conversation during specific moments in fieldwork.

I maintain that consideration of the less-recognized virtues of outsiderness is necessary so that more thought can be pursued on the question of how insider and outsider statuses function together in fieldwork, especially how they both operate as providers of possibilities and problems in the field. The critical review of the foregoing examples indicates that different kinds of data can be acquired when the outsider position is taken as a legitimate point of entry into field work. With that understanding in mind, we now turn to this chapter's final statement, which concerns how researchers may think more deeply about their locations along the outsider-insider continua and what that means for the potential for them to best answer the research questions that drew them into the field. After all, it may often be the case that a researcher wants to know something about intimate matters concerning race and ethnicity that a respondent chooses not to make grounds for public commentary, thus making the outsiderness of the researcher particularly problematic. However, it may also be the case that respondents want to communicate something to a researcher that comes from, and thereby represents, a world far from that which is familiar to the respondent, thus making researcher outsiderness an advantage. Either objective can be advanced by researchers who are intensely considerate of where they think they stand between the ends of insiderness and outsiderness and how they think that respondents are locating them.[4]

In the case of my own work considerations of the virtues and drawbacks of insider status has led me to think about how one of my outsider statuses (affiliation with a university, for instance) allowed my research participants to see me as a conduit to a world far beyond their own. They understood that I was going to take their messages, after embedding them in a discursive style suited for academia, to audiences that they would probably never access by themselves. Many of these men made my outsider status as a university student instrumental for their purposes in talking to me. Accordingly, this provided one context whereby I was enabled to think of my outsiderness as a virtue rather than a hindrance.

The goal in advancing the virtues of outsider statuses, then, is to do so while preserving a place for insiderness given all that has rightfully and necessarily been argued about it. That is, it remains crucial to keep in mind the virtues of outsider status without disregarding the socio-political ramifications of neglecting the insider dimension.

Being on the inside means that the researcher can maintain a shared sense of comfort and ease in interacting in the field, and that the researcher is sensitive and responsive to the cultural and social distinctiveness of the people under study. The overwhelming social dynamic that race continues to be in American life dictates that one should not ignore what the

discussion about insiderness means for the ultimate production of research that reflects integrity and responsibility while dealing with such a volatile topic. Rather than engaging a fierce and narrowly focused quest to increase insiderness, what field researchers must take seriously is their mutual positioning in outsider and insider statuses. This means researchers' taking Reinhartz notion of multiple selves and using it to think about the capacity for these selves to be connected to a range of insider or outsider positionings. While researchers cannot be in full control of how they are located by the people whom they study, they can think about the fieldwork experience as involving an amalgamation of insider and outsider positionings that come together to open up as well as restrict access to data. The challenge, then, is for researchers to strive to maintain a critical reflexivity about this as they work to negotiate the ever-shifting terrain of relating to respondents in field research.

I suggest that researchers must avoid negating attention to the issues and circumstances that may get lost by devoting exclusive attention to affirming insider status. Of course, researchers must always acknowledge and assert the cultural complexity of the people whom they study, and they must strive to capture and represent the voices of these people to the best extent possible given that the researcher is the ultimate creator of the statement being made about them. However, researchers must develop a keen appreciate and preparedness to make use of what being on the outside can do to cultivate discussion rather than hinder it. In part, this comes out of sincere consideration of the status that one occupies as a researcher. Through such functioning, one is already indelibly grounded in a particular outsider kind of status; that being an individual that enters a social setting not simply to engage it like other participants might, but to analyze and document something about it for audiences often far removed from it.

The quest to enhance one's insider status and well as contend with outsider status essentially is an effort to create, develop, and sustain conversations in the field. Hence, the aim of the researcher must be to work toward maintaining the values and perspectives that are associated with insiderness while being conscientious about and appreciative of what being on the outside means for advancing conversations with people. This is especially the case for the often idiosyncratic, but sometimes turbulent and virulent circumstances pertaining to race and race relations in America. Taking into account the case examples and arguments raised here, it is crucial to think about how the insider status can sometimes work against that goal.

Conclusion: Future Pursuits and Possibilities

As for future considerations, I believe that the ethnographic interview can shed even more light than it already has on how people think about social institutions that are presumed in American society to be relevant to their lives, but in certain ways are not perceived as such by research participants. By this I mean that future research can explore more critically what people understand to be the ways and means by which people get ahead in American society given the changes in labor market dynamics and the impact of technology. I believe this work can be extended to considerations of how people make sense of schooling as a mobility-enhancing experience (for instance, looking carefully at how people determine the worth or significance of certain kinds of schools given their objectives in life, or even certain employment sectors). In essence, intensive consideration of how people think about social institutions and processes that are far removed rom their everyday lives can advance understandings of what people are prepared to do (or not do) on their behalf in order to improve their life prospects,

NOTES

REFERENCES

Andersen, Margaret L.1993. "Studying Across Difference: Race, Class, and Gender in Qualitative Research." Race, Ethnicity, and Research Methods. ed. by John Stanfield II and Rutledge M. Dennis, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishers.

Baca Zinn, Maxine. 1979. "Field Research In Minority Communities." Social Problems, 27: 209-219.

Bourgeois, Philippe 1996. In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio. New York: Cambridge University Press.

De Andrade, Lelia Lomba. 2000. "Negotiations from the Inside: Constructing Racial and Ethnic Identity in Qualitative Research." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 29 (3): 268-290.

Denzin, Norman K. 1997. Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

DeVault, Marjorie. 1995. " Ethnicity and Expertise: Racial Ethnic Knowledge in Sociological Research." Gender and Society, 9: 612-631.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Hannerz, Ulf. 1969. Soulside: Inquiries in to Ghetto Culture and Community. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hertz, Rosanna (ed.). 1997. Reflexivity and Voice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jackson, John L. 2001. Harlem World: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, Steiner. 1996. Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative research Interviewing. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ladner, Joyce. 1973. The Death of White Sociology. New York: Vintage Books.

Lamont, Michele. 2002. The Dignity of Working Men. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Merton, Robert. 1972. "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge." American Journal of Sociology, 78: 9-47.

Naples, Nancy A. 1996. "A Feminist Revisiting of the Insider/Outsider Debate: The 'Outsider Phenomenon' in Rural Iowa." Qualitative Sociology, 19:83-106.

Patillo-McCoy, Mary. 1999. Black Picket Fences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Poland, Blake and Ann Pederson. 1998. "Reading Between the Lines: Interpreting Silences in Qualitative Research."Qualitative Inquiry, volume 4 (2), pp. 293-312.

Reinharz, Shulamit. 1997. "Who Am I? The Need for a Variety of Selves in the Field." Reflexivity and Voice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 1987. "When Gender is not Enough: Women Interviewing Women." Gender and Society, volume 1 (2), pp. 172-207.

Song, Miri and David Parker. 1995. "Commmonality, Difference, and the Dynamics of Disclosure in In-Depth Interviewing." Sociology, May, 29 (2), pp. 241-256.

Stack, Carol. 1974. All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Stanfield, John H. and Rutledge M. Dennis (eds.). 1993. Race, Ethnicity, and Research Methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishers.

Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2002. "Doing the Hustle: Constructing the Ethnographer in the American Ghetto." Ethnography, 3: 91-111.

Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2000. American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waters, Mary C. 1999. Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities. Cambridge, MA and New York: Harvard University Press and Russell Sage Foundation

Wilson, William J. 1974. "The New Black Sociology: Reflections on the 'Insiders' and 'Outsiders' Controversy." Black Sociologists: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Ed. by James E. Blackwell and Morris Janowitz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

---

1 Venkatesh is a notable exception in that he emphasizes how an outsider status can advance the process of data collection.

2 In some cases, scholars chose to explain their work in this tradition by affirming how it concerns people, issues, or circumstances that are intimately associated with or a part of the researcher's own life experiences. One example of such an effort is Patillo-McCoy (1999), an African American ethnographer who studied the social dynamics of a class sector of the African American community in which she also holds membership. Another is by a white American anthropologist, Carol Stack (1974) who studied the family dynamics of low-income African American mothers while she, herself, was a young mother.

3 While Naples (1996) has effectively problematized the notion of the insider status as the most relevant position for data collection her commentary does not comprehensively explore outsider statuses that apply to the researcher. Her point about outsider status concerns how respondents identify with that position. Furthermore, while De Andrade argues that insider status is neither immediately presumed nor static in field work on racial and ethnic concerns, her commentary implicitly validates the vision of the insider perspective as the ideal for qualitative inquiry. She does so by affirming that working

toward increased insider status is the ultimate goal, and she does so at the expense of exploring how that effort might be a hindrance for data collection. The challenge remains to better situate the outsider status as a powerful position by which to explore social phenomena such as racial consciousness and race relations.

4 Indeed, some of the most insightful findings from ethnographies of black Americans that were conducted by non-African Americans were predicated on the authors' making explicit mention of their initial lack of understanding or profound curiosity about some aspect of African American culture (even if such explication was presented in an apologetic or discerning tone). Ulf Hannerz's Soulside (1969) is replete with numerous testimonies from the author about how unfamiliar or intrigued he was with certain events or phenomena unfolding around him as he studied a poor-to-working class African American street in 1960s-era Washington, D.C.. It remains that many classic and contemporary ethnographies of poor black Americans done by non-African Americans rarely dwell in great detail upon the revelations brought to the author by his or her outsider status.